



L. SIMONSON • BATISTA • FABER

STEEL

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STEEL

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~ HaCsA ~ nom deplume ~



THOOM
THOOM

BLAM!

BAM!

BAM!
BAM!

THOOM

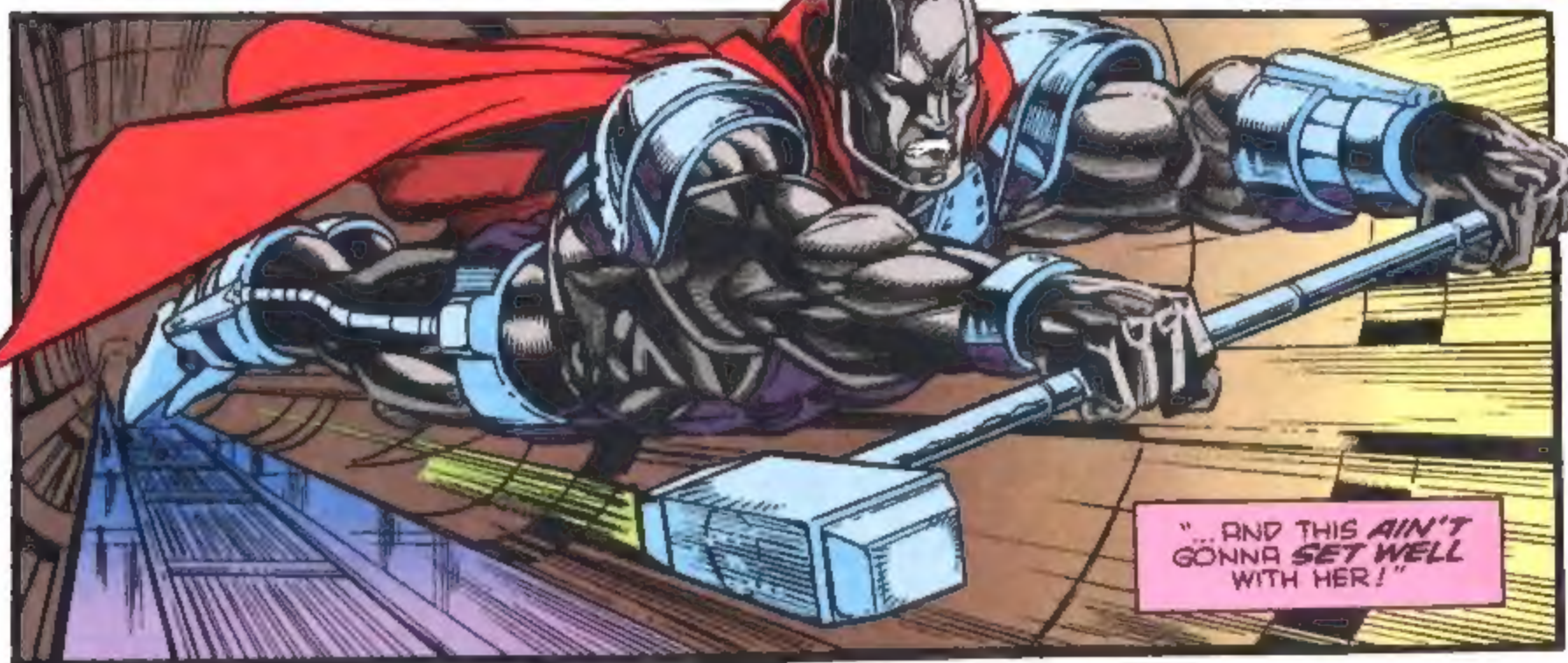
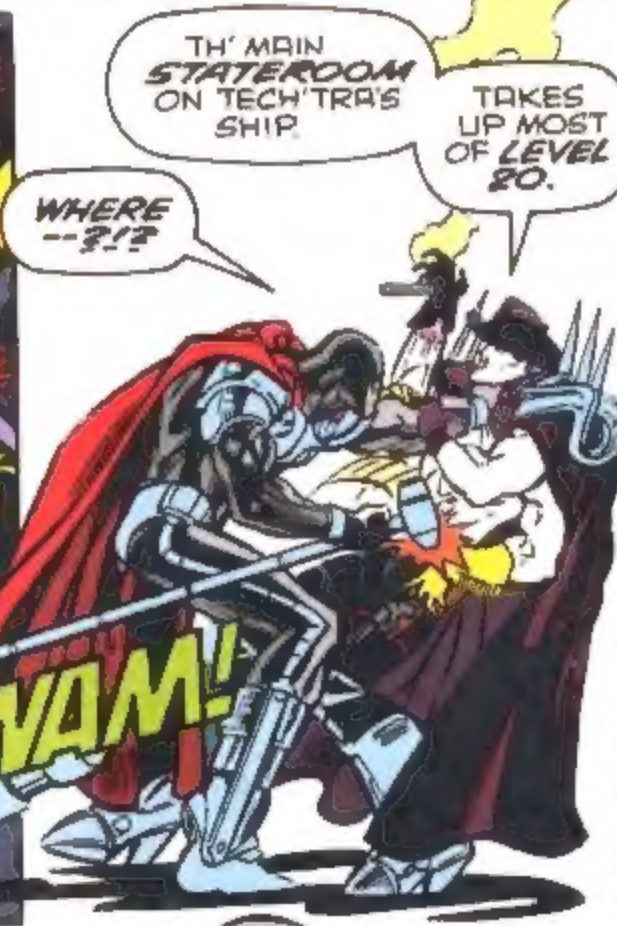
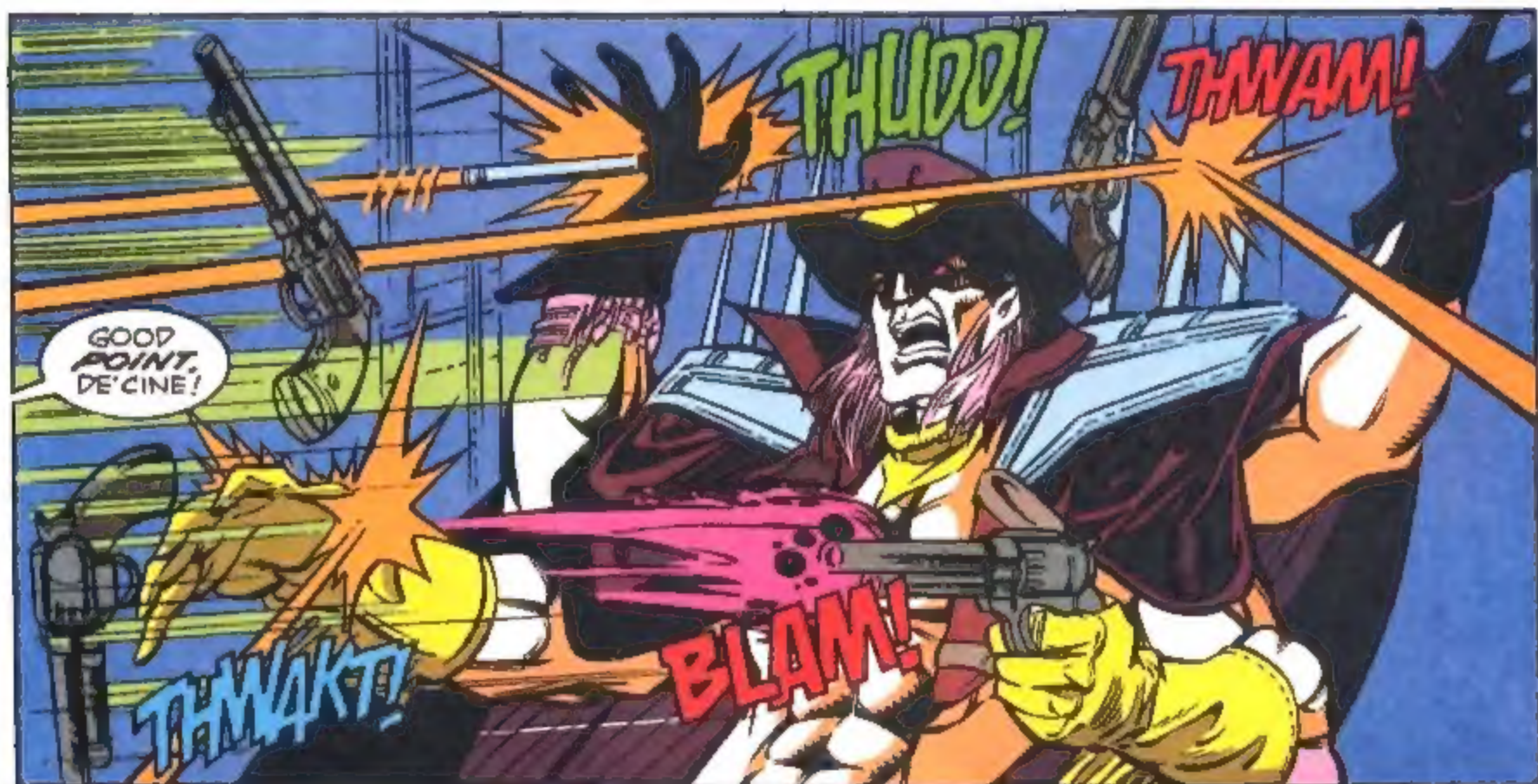
BUT ENJOYABLE
AS THIS LI'L
FANDANGO
HAS BEEN...

...YOU AIN'T
STOPPED
DE'CINE FROM
DROPPIN' HIS ROPE
ON MAXIMA.

THE GREAT E S C A P E

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CHRIS BATESTA
Penciller
DAN DAVIS
Inker
PAT BROSSAU
Letterer
DAVE GRAFF
Colorist
CHRIS DUFFY
Assistant Editor
FRANK PITTARESE
Editor

Steel created by Louise Simonson
and Jon Bogdanove





--BY VIRTUE OF THE
SACRED **POWER**
INVESTED IN ME BY THE
COUNCIL OF RAHRAN--

--I NOW
PROMOUNCE
YOU--



WHAM

WHAT'S
THAT?

IT
MATTERS
NOT! IGNORE
THE INTERRUPTION,
MY SON.

WE
SHALL
EDIT IT
OUT OF THE **BROAD-
CAST
TAPES.**

NOW,
BISH'OP...
AS YOU WERE
SAYING...

I...I NOW
PROMOUNCE
YOU HUSBAND
AND--

..WHOOOPH!

THUD!



PORTABLE
INHIBITOR
BEAM STILL
HOLDS MAXIMA
CAPTIVE!

IF I CAN
SHATTER THE
CONTROLS--

SHRAKKT!

YOU'LL
GO NO
FURTHER,
STEEL!



SKRASSH

NO PROB
LEM!

THOOM!

I'M AS
FAR AS
I NEED
TO BE!

FREE!

AND ALL
IT WILL
TAKE IS ONE
MOMENT--





--TO
FLATTEN
YOU!

--THIS
WILL BE A
MUCH MORE
POWERFUL
SOLUTION--
FOR THEM!

MOTHER!

SKRAHH

MOVE!

YOU'VE
SLOWED
THEM DOWN,
MAX.

COME ON!
LET'S GET
BACK TO
DE'CINE'S
YACHT--

MAXIMA!
DON'T!

THEIR
SHIELDS
WILL DIRECT
THE POWER OF
YOUR MENTAL
BOLT BACK
AT YOU!

DO NOT
WORRY, STEEL!
I REMEMBER!
BESIDES...

--AND
GET
OUT OF
HERE!

SQUEESIE!
POOR LITTLE
SQUEESIE! MAXIMA
HAS DESTROYED
HIM!

COMPUTER--
LOCK ALL BAY
DOORS!

KEEP STEEL
AND MAXIMA
ABOARD MY
BATTLE
CRUISER!

AS YOU
COMMAND!

MY
PETS,
THEY HAVE
SLAIN
ONE OF YOUR
FELLOWS!

AFTER
THEM!

TOGETHER,
WE WILL
DESTROY THEM
UTTERLY!

AARROOOO



LISTEN!
TECH'TRA'S
CREATURES
ARE BAYING
AFTER US!

WE ARE
THERE!
DOOR--
OPEN!

I'M SORRY!
I AM NO LONGER
PROGRAMMED TO
OBEY THAT COM-
MAND!

AH'M
RIGHT
BEHIND
YA...

...AN' THIS
LITTLE PER-
SHOOTER'S
GOT ARMOR-
PIERCIN'
SHELLS!

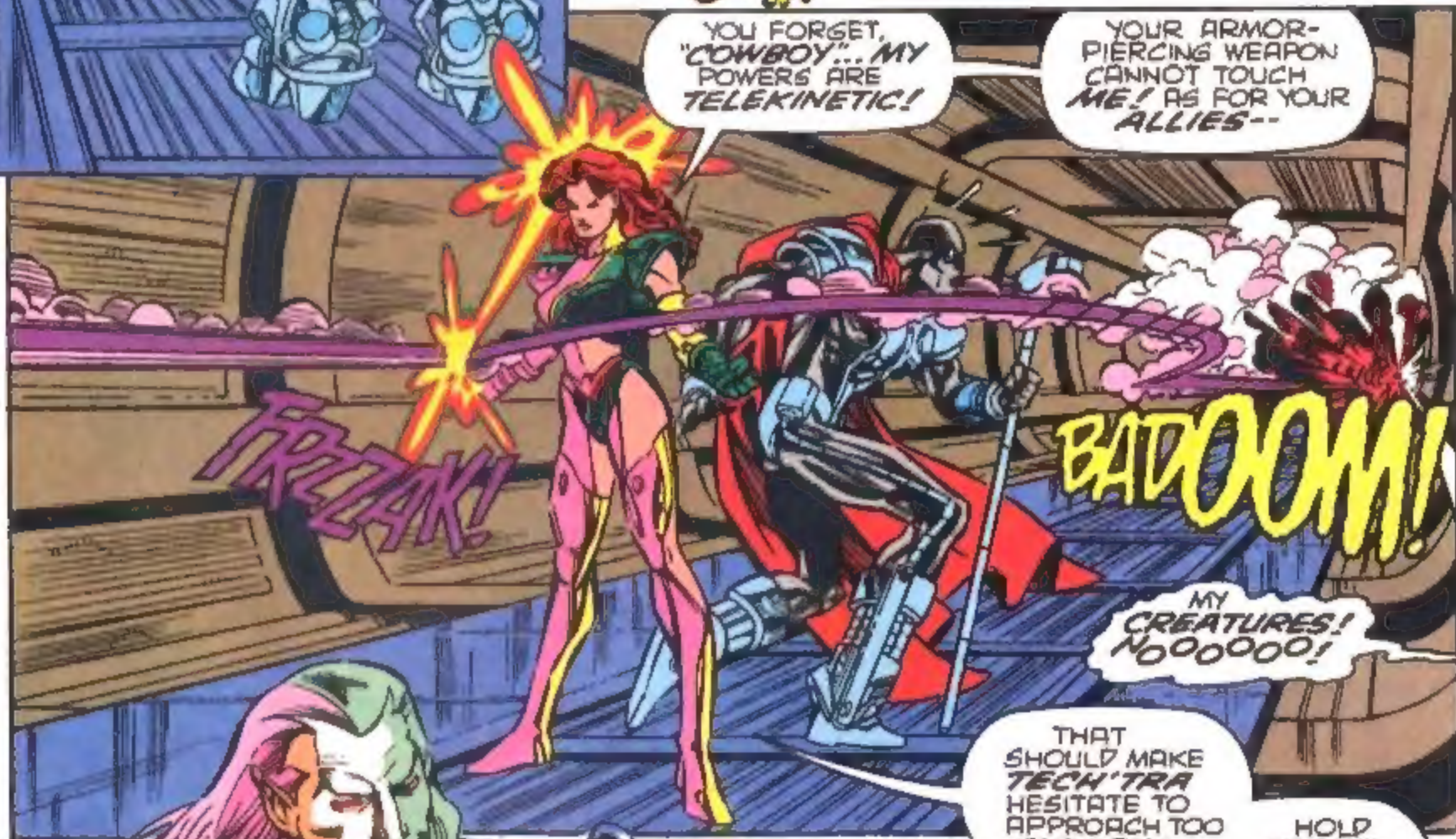


WHAT
NOW? IF
WE CAN'T
GO FOR-
WARD--

THERE'S
NO TURNIN'
BACK FER YA
NEITHER!



FACE IT!
YER CAUGHT
LIKE WEASELS
IN A TRAP!



THOOM! THOOM!

HAVE ONE CHANCE!

IF I CAN LODGE A RIVET IN THE BARREL OF HIS CANNON--

THWAK!

MY GUN!

KRAKOOM

BLAM!

IT IS WEAKENING!

WRAM

AND IN TIME I WILL PREVAIL!

ONE DOWN AT LEAST TEMPORARILY! HOW'S THE DOOR COMING?

TIME, HUH? LOOKS LIKE OUR TIME HAS JUST ABOUT RUN OUT!

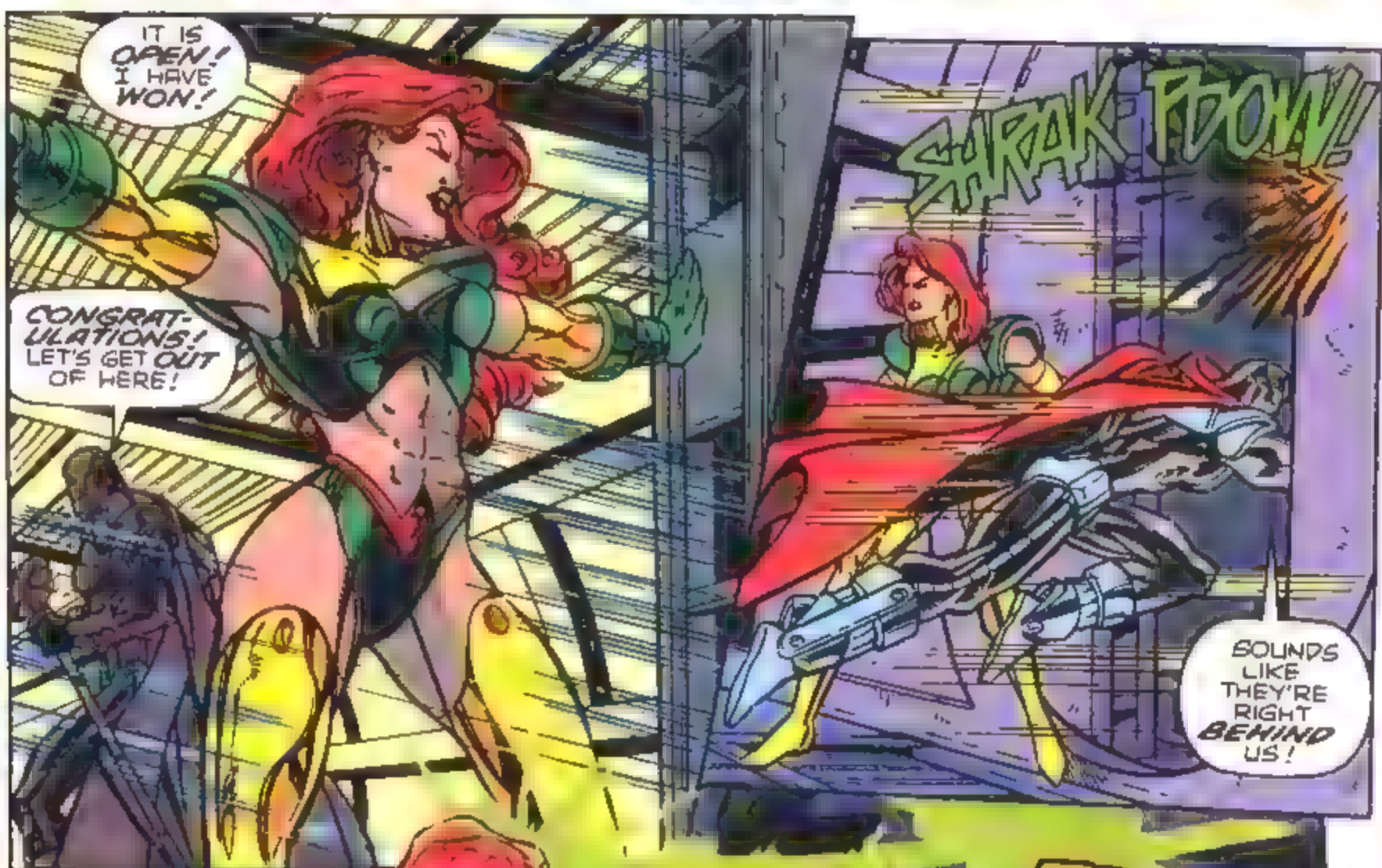
BLAM!

SKRAKOW

THAT WEAPON HAS BEEN SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED TO SLAUGHTER ALMERACIANS MY SON!

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

STEEL IS DELIBERATELY SHIELDING MAXIMA WITH HIS ARMOR!

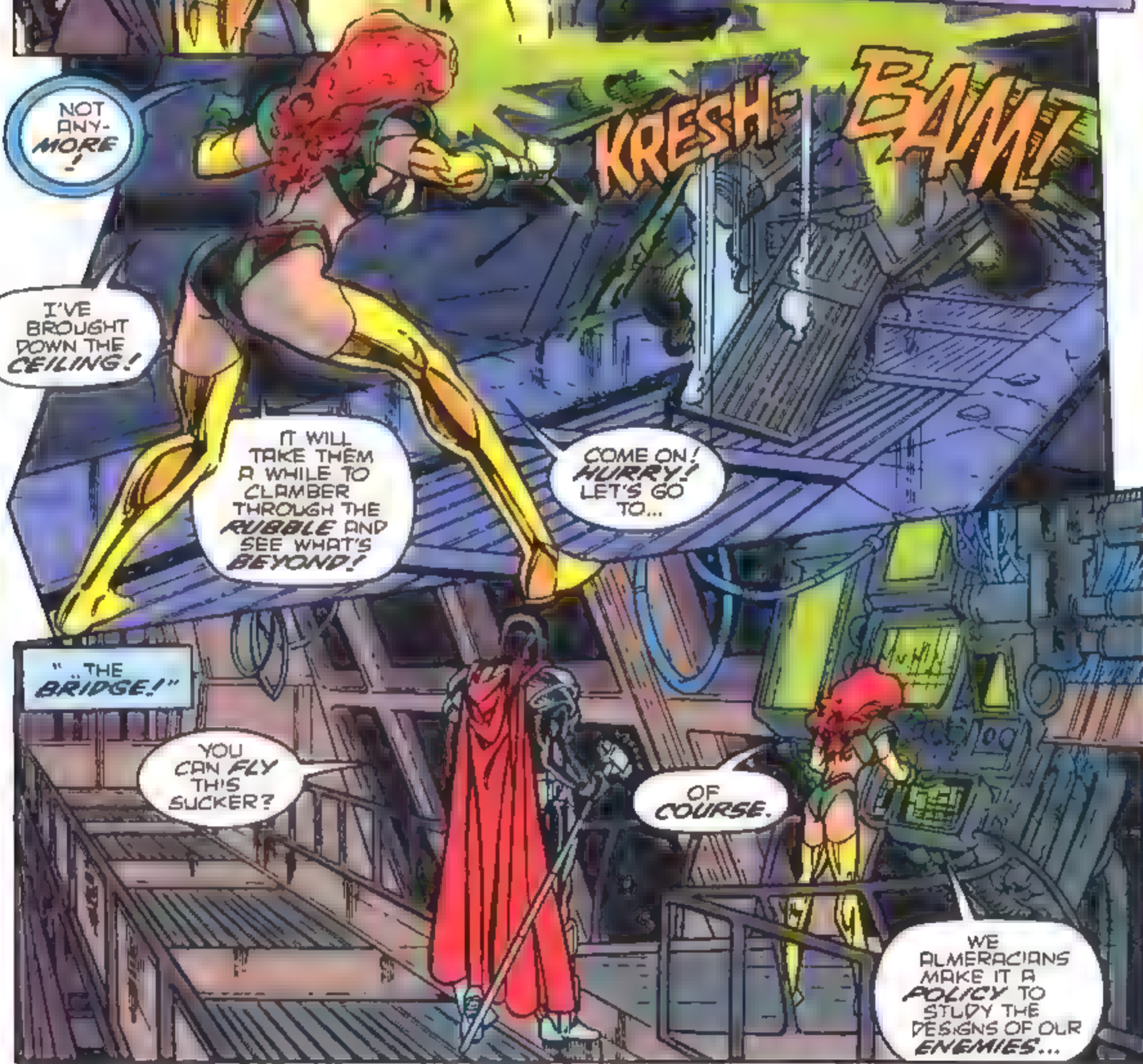


IT IS OPEN!
I HAVE WON!

CONGRATULATIONS!
LET'S GET OUT
OF HERE!

SHRAK FLOW!

SOUNDS
LIKE
THEY'RE
RIGHT
BEHIND
US!



NOT
ANY-
MORE!

I'VE
BROUGHT
DOWN THE
CEILING!

KRESH BAW!

IT WILL
TAKE THEM
A WHILE TO
CLAMBER
THROUGH THE
RUBBLE AND
SEE WHAT'S
BEYOND!

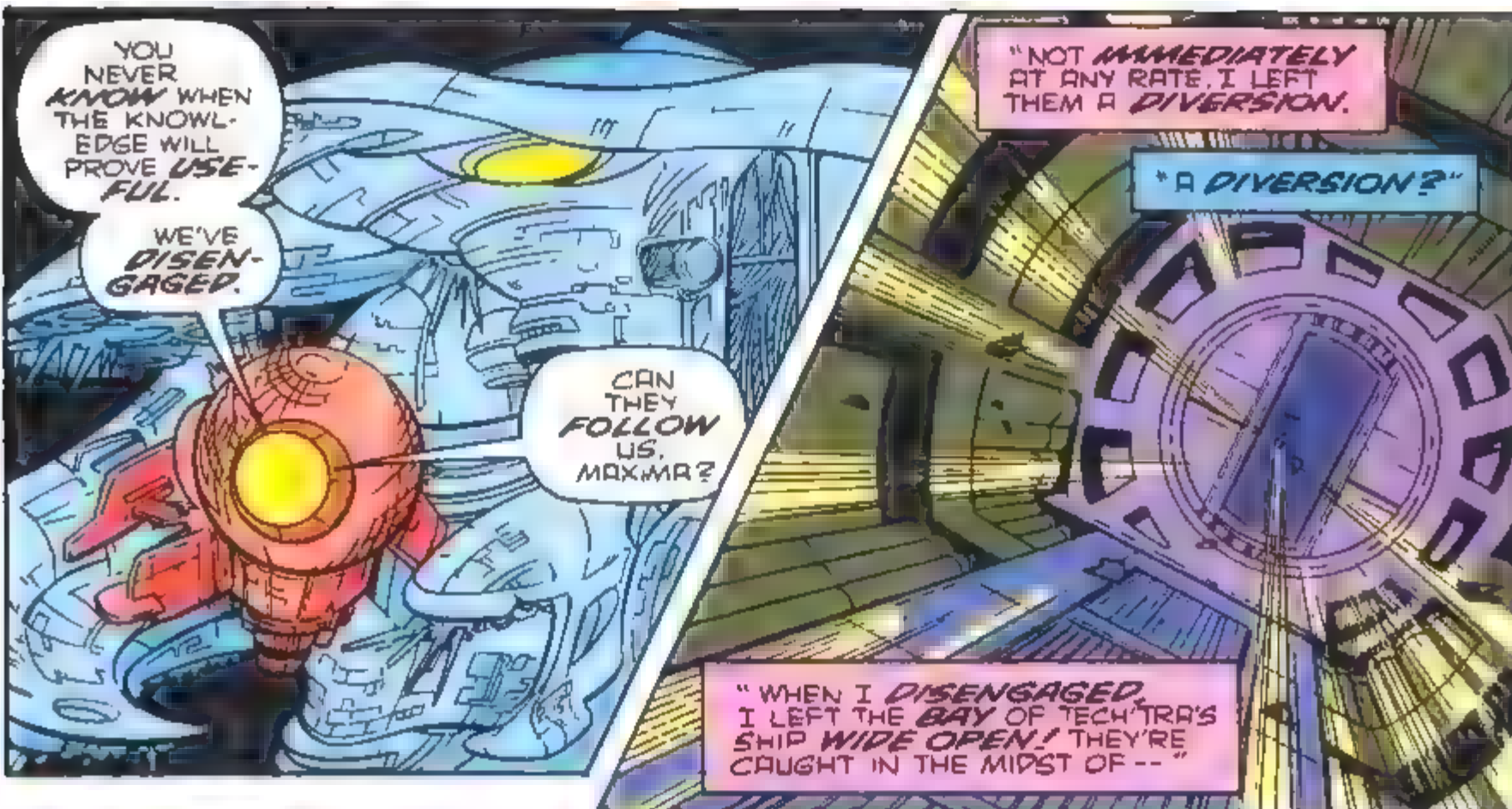
COME ON!
HURRY!
LET'S GO
TO...

"THE
BRIDGE!"

YOU
CAN FLY
THIS
SUCKER?

OF
COURSE.

WE
ALMERACIANS
MAKE IT A
POLICY TO
STUDY THE
DESIGNS OF OUR
ENEMIES...



YOU NEVER **KNOW** WHEN THE KNOWLEDGE WILL PROVE **USEFUL**.

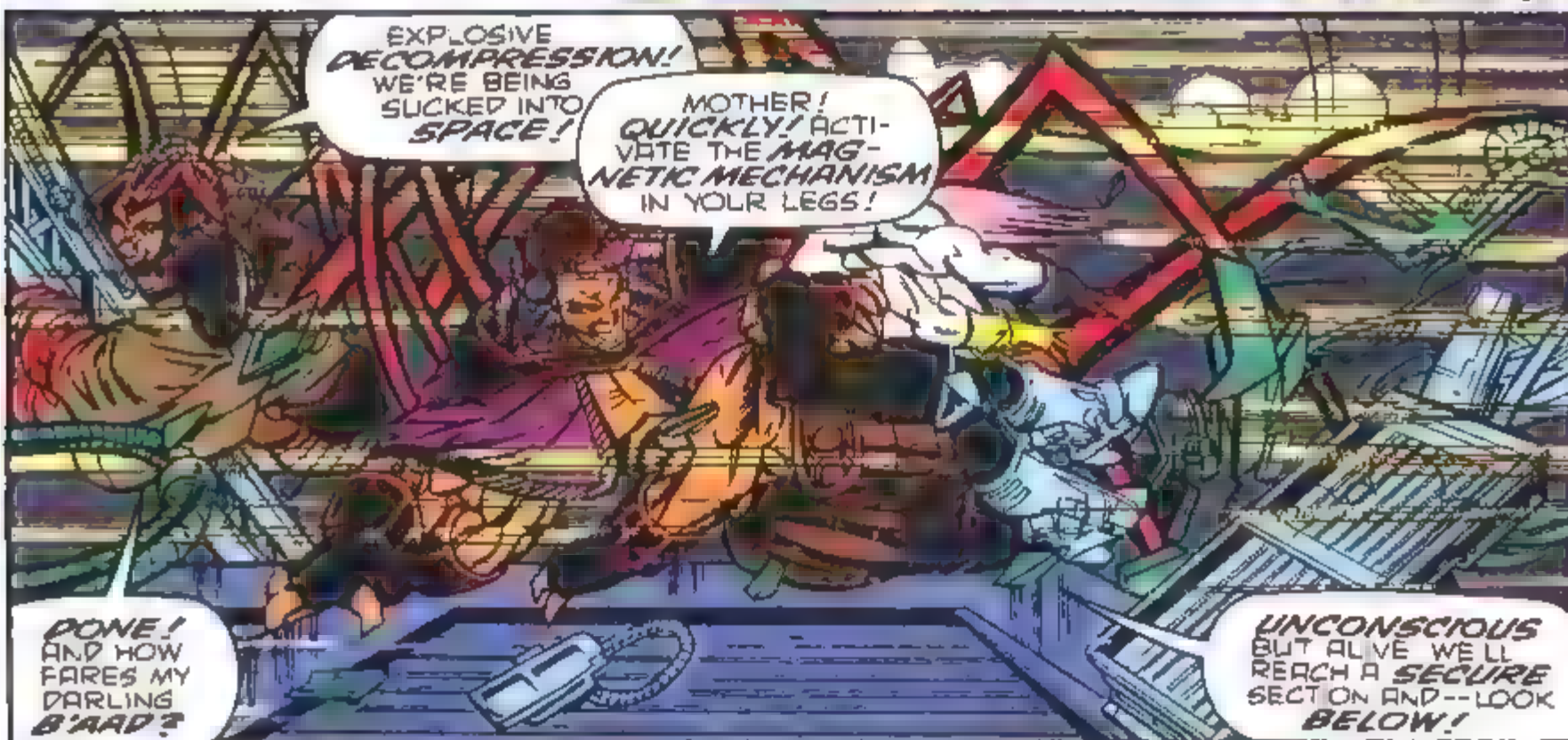
WE'VE **DISENGAGED**.

CAN THEY **FOLLOW** US, MAX? MR?

"NOT **IMMEDIATELY** AT ANY RATE, I LEFT THEM A **DIVERSION**."

"A **DIVERSION**?"

"WHEN I **DISENGAGED**, I LEFT THE **BAY** OF TECH'TRA'S SHIP **WIDE OPEN**! THEY'RE CAUGHT IN THE MIDST OF --"

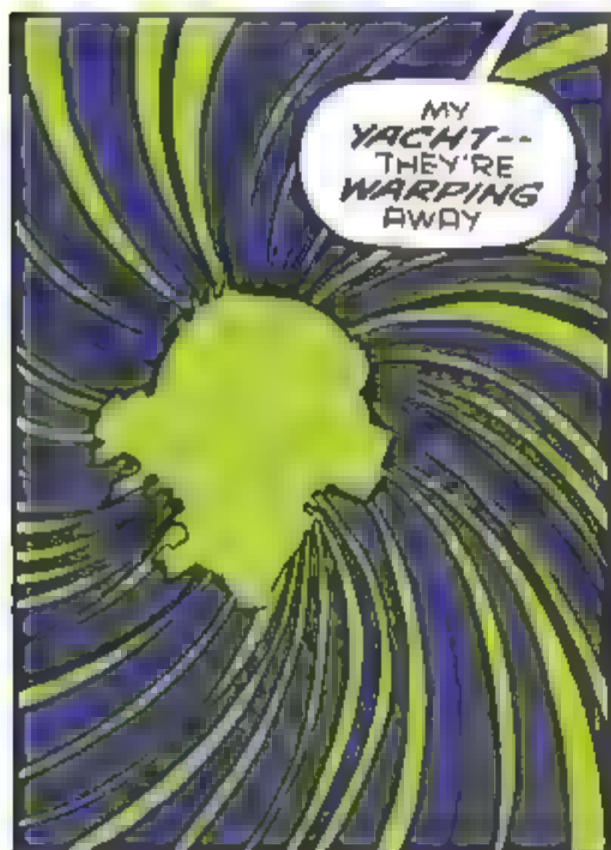


EXPLOSIVE DECOMPRESSION! WE'RE BEING SUCKED INTO **SPACE**!

MOTHER! **QUICKLY!** ACTIVATE THE **MAGNETIC MECHANISM** IN YOUR LEGS!

DONE! AND HOW FARES MY DARLING **B'AAD**?

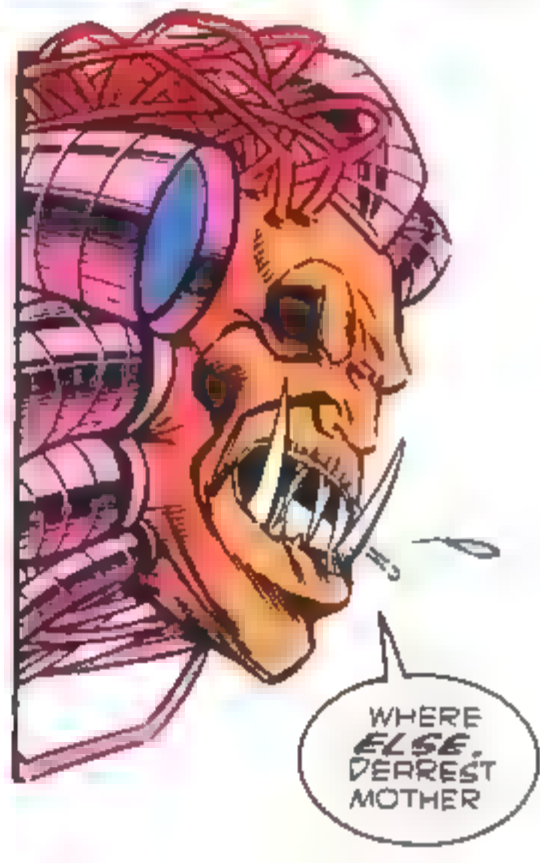
UNCONSCIOUS BUT ALIVE WE'LL REACH A **SECURE** SECTION AND--LOOK **BELOW!**



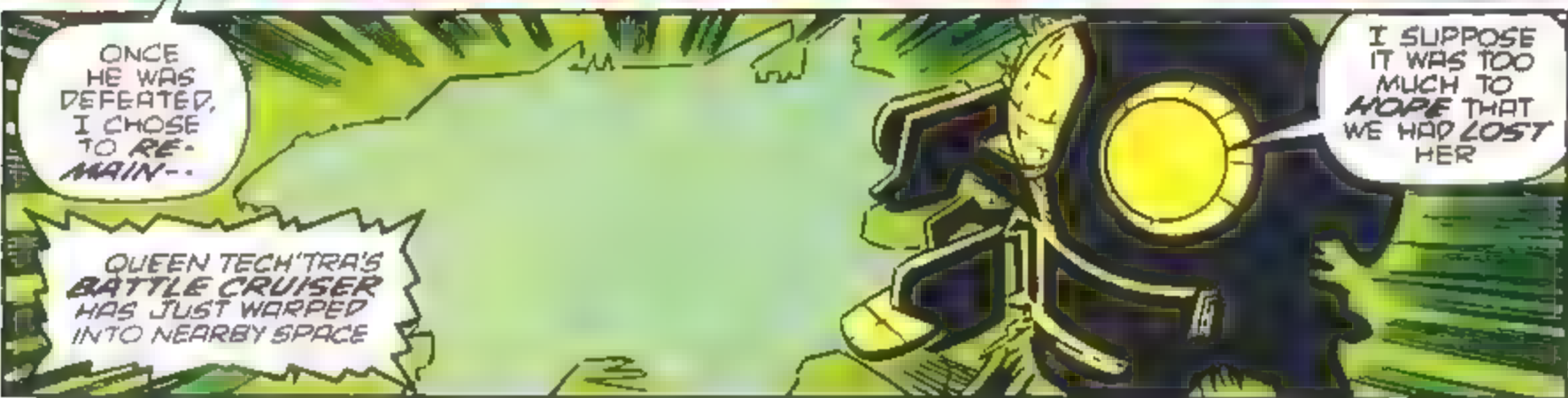
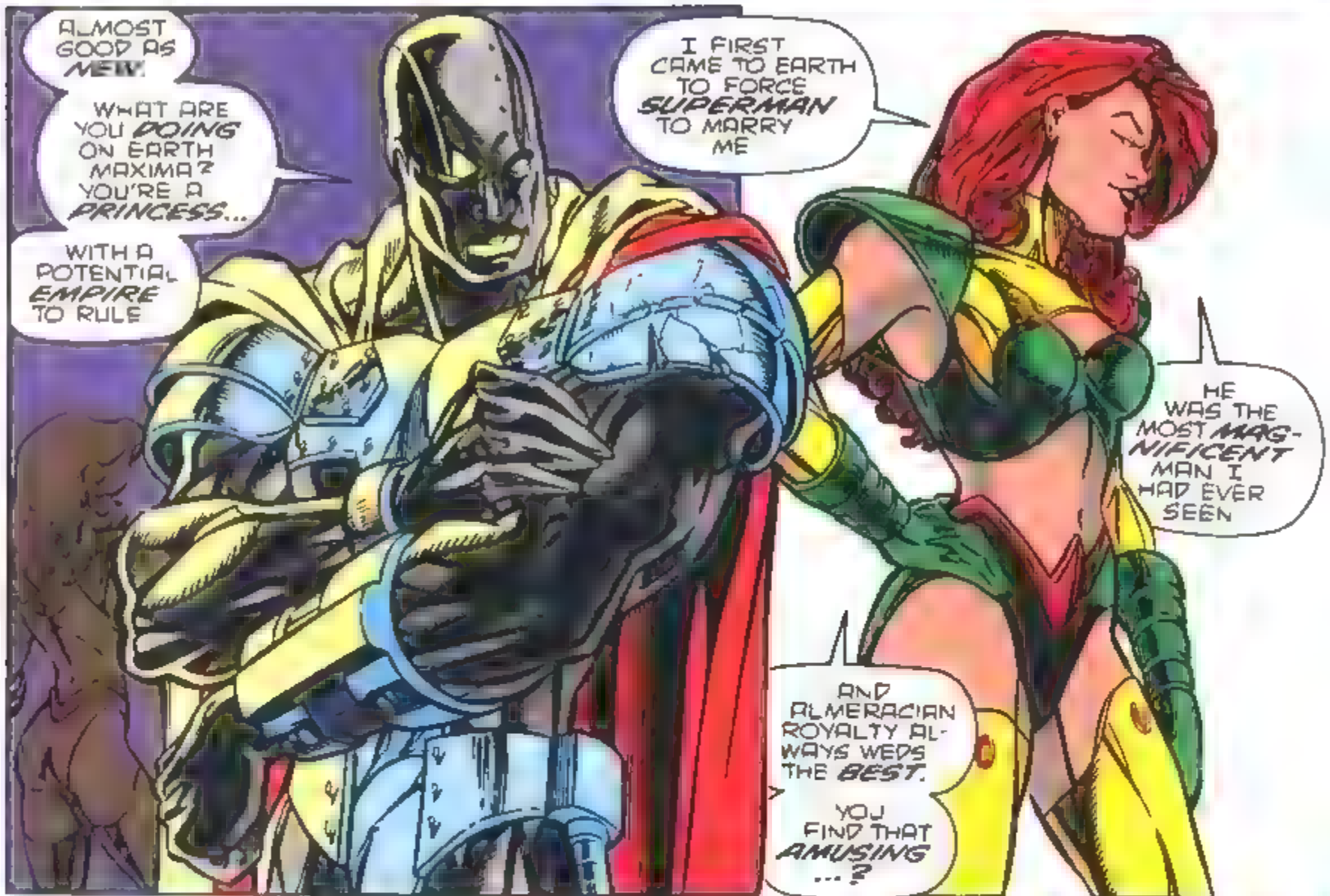
MY **YACHT--** THEY'RE **WARPING** AWAY



"BY THE MAKER'S GAUNTLETS, MY SON! WHERE CAN THEY HAVE **GONE**?"



WHERE **ELSE**, DEAREST MOTHER



AS I
THOUGHT,
THE FOOLS
HAVE RETURNED
TO EARTH.

WE
COULD TAKE
THAT PLANET
APART TO
RETRIEVE HER,
MY SON ..

BUT
THAT
SHOULD
NOT BE
NECES-
SARY.

MY
YACHT!
YOU'LL
DESTROY
IT!

HOW
MANY TIMES
HAVE YOU
REFUSED TO
INCREASE ITS
ARMA-
MENT...

... BECAUSE
YOU DIDN'T
WANT TO
SACR FICE
SPEED?

MY FIRE-
POWER IS
INDEED
SUPERIOR ENOUGH
TO GUARANTEE
THAT

" THEY WILL
NOT **ESCAPE!**"

TECH'TRA
COULD POSE
A TREMENDOUS
THREAT TO
EARTH...

BUT
THERE'LL
BE NO **POINT**
F SHE TH NKS
WE'RE
DEAD.

THEN
YOU TRLY
BELIEVE
TECH'TRA
WILL **BELIEVE**
OUR DECEIT...

AND
RETURN TO
KRENO?

OF
COURSE.

THE
YACHT IS
AUTOMATICALLY
**RETURN-
ING FIRE,**
OBSCURING
TECH'TRA'S
ABILITY TO
OBSERVE OUR
ESCAPE

AND THE
YACHT'S
ENGINE S SET
FOR OVER-
LOAD?

" THEN OPEN
THE POD DOOR,
PRINCESS AND
LET'S **BAIL!**"

WE'RE **AWAY!**
CARE TO BEGIN
THE **COUNTDOWN,**
PRINCESS?

IT
WILL BE
MY **PLEAS-
URE.** 5. 4
3 2
1



BOOM!

BA-

MY SHIP!

WHAT HAPPENED?!

LASER FIRE MUST HAVE IGNITED AN ENERGY EMISSIONS LEAK

AND MAXIMA ...?

SHE MUST HAVE DIED WITH THE DESTRUCTION OF MY SHIP!

THAT AVENUE
TO CONTROL OF
ALMERAC IS NOW
CLOSED TO US,
MY SON

WE
WILL HAVE
TO FIND
ANOTHER
WAY

FOR
NOW, IT'S
BEST THAT
WE RETURN
TO OUR OWN
EMPIRE.

LOOK
MAXIMA!
TECHTRA'S
SHIP HAS
WARPED
AWAY FROM
EARTH!

THEY
BELIEVED
OUR SLATER-
FUGE! IT
WORKED!
EARTH'S
SAVED!

AND
DE'CINE
PAID FOR HIS
IMPERTINENCE
WITH HIS PRIZE
RACING
YACHT!

LOOK,
MAX! ON THE
SCREEN! A
LARGE CHUNK
OF DEBRIS!

"STEEL--I CAN-
NOT MANUEVER
AWAY IN TIME!"

IT
PUNCHED
A HOLE
IN THE SIDE
OF THE
POD!

GET YOUR
BREATHING
MASK ON THEN
AND THANK HEAVEN
FOR TELEPATHIC
COMMUNICATION!

THERE'S
NOT MUCH
AIR LEFT
INSIDE MY
TANKS
...!

I LEFT
MY SHIP IN
ORBIT
NEARBY
HURRY!

AIR
SUPPLIES
REAL
LOW.

DO NOT
WORRY.
STEEL! MY SHIP
SHOULD BE IN
ORBIT WHERE
I LEFT--

STEEL
RISKED HIS
LIFE TO **AID**
ME TIME AND
AGAIN I CANNOT
LET HIM **DIE**
NOW

IF I DIVE
WITH H.M. INTO
THE ATMOS-
PHERE, WOULD
HIS ARMOR
PROTECT
H.M.?

IT IS NOT
HERE! BUT
THESE ARE THE
COORDINATES!
WHERE CAN IT
BE?

OR WOULD
HE **BURN?** IF
I DO NOT LO-
CATE IT SOON,
I MUST TAKE
THE **RISK--**

MAXIMA!
ARE YOU THERE?
I'M THINKING AS
LOUD AS I CAN,
DARN IT! ANSWER
ME!

STAY
THERE! WAIT
FOR US! WE'RE
COMING TO GET
YOU

BEETLE!
WE ARE HERE!
STEEL'S ALMOST
OUT OF AIR.

STEEL!
I JUST
HEARD **BLUE**
BEETLE'S
VOICE!



HE HAS
THE SHIP!
THERE! HE'S
COME TO RES-
CUE US!

HOLD
ON...



"... WE'LL BE
INSIDE IN
A MINUTE!"

THANKS,
ATOM! FEELS
REAL GOOD
TO *BREATHE*

I DON'T MIND
TELLING YOU..
BLACKING
OUT... THOUGHT
I WAS A
GONER.

THEN ATOM
AND I HEADED
BACK UP HERE
TO *SEARCH*
FOR YOU!

WE WERE
SCOURING
NEARBY SPACE
WHEN WE REG-
ISTERED A
SERIES OF EX-
PLOSIONS.

WHAT THE HECK
HAPPENED?

NEVER
MIND. YOU
CAN TELL US
AFTER WE GET
YOU BACK TO
EARTH.

NO NOT
YET. GOT TO
DO.. WHAT I
CAME HERE
FOR CHECK
OTHER
ANOMALY.


BUT--

WE
PICKED UP
AN *ENERGY*
BLAST IN
SPACE IN THE
VICINITY OF
WHERE YOU LEFT
YOUR *CRAFT*.

WE
COULDN'T
RAISE YOU
I CAME UP,
GRABBED
THE SHIP, AND
BROUGHT IT
BACK TO
EARTH.


IF THAT IS
WHAT STEEL
WANTS,
BEETLE, THEN
THAT IS WHAT
WE WILL DO.

HE
HELPED
ME WITH *MY*
ANOMALY
NOW WE WILL
HELP HIM
WITH *HIS*.



IT'S A **SATELLITE**...
EXPERTLY HIDDEN, VIRTUALLY
INVISIBLE TO **RADAR**... AND
ALMOST INVISIBLE
TO **SIGHT**

IT
SEEMS
TO BE
SENDING
OUT **IN-**
FORMATION...



BUT, I CAN'T
TELL **WHERE**
IT'S BEAMING,
OR, WHAT KIND
OF INFO IT'S
SENDING

I WANT TO BE
THE ONE TO
APPROACH
IT, MAX.MA

IF IT **IS**
HAZARD'S,
IT COULD BE
DANGER-
OUS.

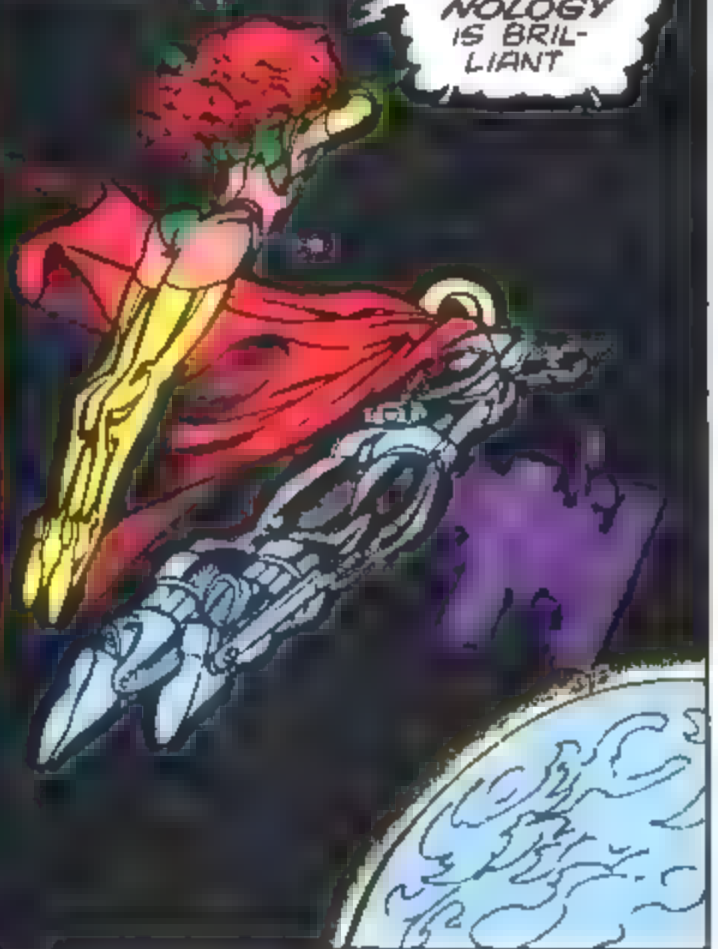
YOU
WENT WITH
ME, STEEL
ACCEPTED MY
DANGER AS
YOUR OWN.


"...AND
NOW I
WILL GO
WITH
YOU."

THE LIGHT
IS BEING
DETRACTED...
BENT AROUND
THE SATELLITE.

THAT
IS WHY IT
IS VIRTUALLY
IMPOSSIBLE
TO SEE

WHO-
EVER DID
THIS, HIS
USE OF
TECH-
NOLOGY
IS BRIL-
LIANT





BRILLIANT...
AND IF IT IS
HAZARD'S, IT WILL
BE DEADLY.

HOW
WILL YOU
KNOW
WHOSE
IT IS?

I'M...
NOT
SURE.

BUT IF IT
IS, AS I
SUSPECT,
HIS **SPY
SATEL-
LITE**...

... IN TIME
I'LL BE ABLE
TO TRACK ITS
TRANSMISSIONS
AND LOCATE
HIS **HEAD-
QUARTERS**.

NO! DO
NOT GO ANY
CLOSER! IT IS
SHIELDED... EVEN
TO **TELEPATHIC
PROBES**...

... BUT I
CAN **FEEL**
THAT IT IS--

-- **BOOBY-
TRAPPED!**

WHEN
YOU'RE RIGHT,
YOU'RE **RIGHT!**
IT'S **HAZARD'S**
ALL RIGHT, HIS **M.O.**
EXACTLY.

THIS
SEEMS TO
BE OUR DAY
TO HAVE
THINGS **BLOW
UP** IN OUR
FACES!

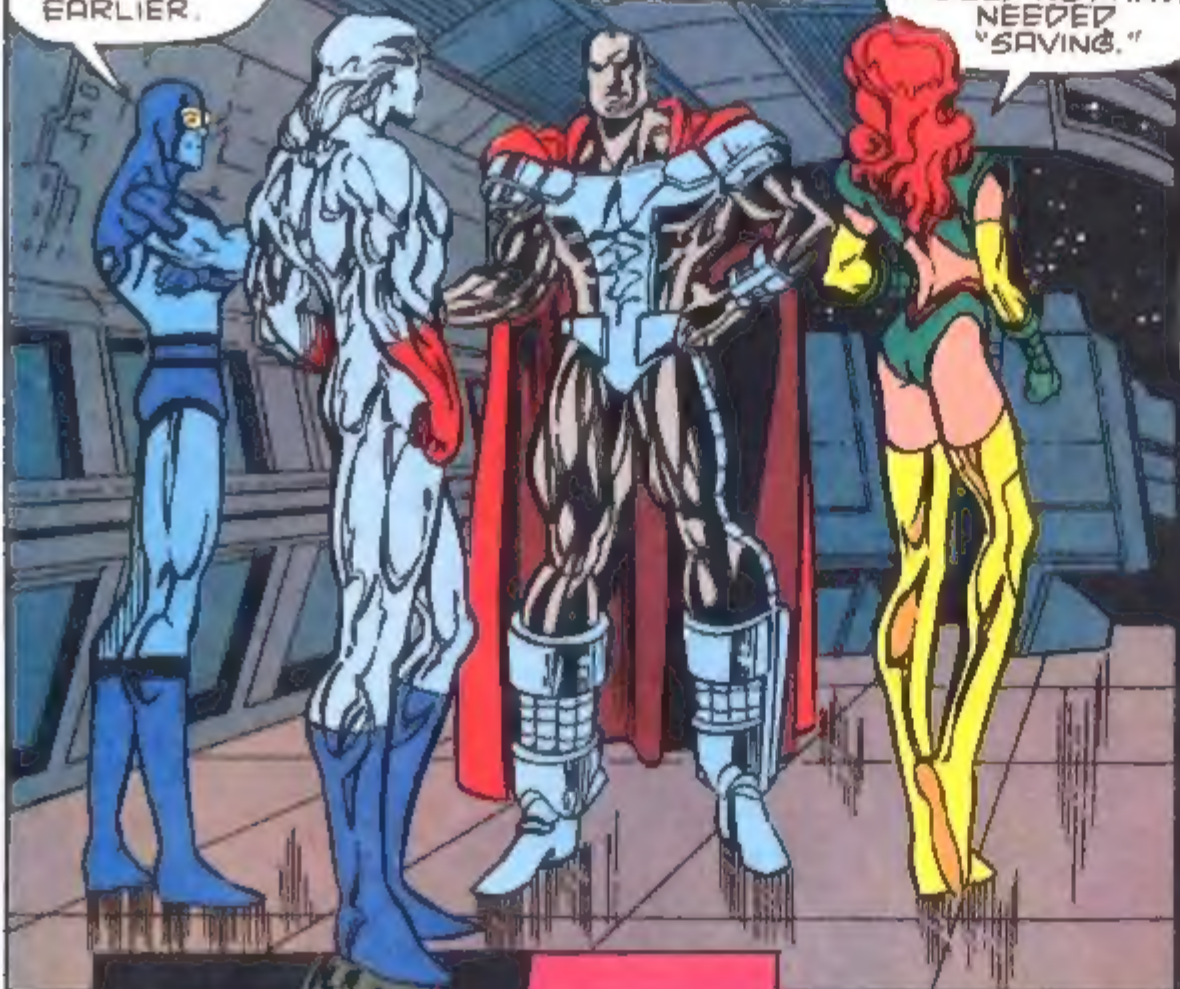
...I SUPPOSE
YOU'LL GET
AROUND TO
TELLING US
WHAT **HAP-
PENED**
EARLIER.

EVENTUALLY,
PERHAPS,
WHAT HAPPENED
SHOULD **NOT**
HAVE HAPPENED.

IT SEEMS THAT
MY ASSOCIATION
WITH **HUMAN-
KIND** HAD MADE
ME **SOFT**. I
SHOULD NOT HAVE
NEEDED
"SAVING."

WELL, YOU
GAVE IT YOUR
BEST SHOT
AND THEN
SOME...

...BUT,
STEEL, IT
LOOKS LIKE
HAZARD
DOESN'T
WANT TO BE
FOUND.



STILL... IT
WAS **HAZARD**
WHO I SET
OUT TO FIND
IN THE **FIRST**
PLACE!

YOU TRIED
TO STOP **ONE**
VILLAIN, MY
FRIEND, AND
SAVED YOUR
EARTH FROM
ANOTHER.



FOR
NOW, YOU
MUST BE
CONTENT
WITH
THAT.

END

STEEL

DC COMICS

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PREVIOUSLY IN STEEL: Steel and Maxima have been taken hostage aboard a Krenon spaceship. Maxima is about to be forced into marrying De'cine, a hideous alien with plans to conquer Almerac, Maxima's home planet. Steel, because of the anomalies in his armor, is believed to be a cyborg. If this proves true, De'cine intends to present Steel to his mother, Techtra, to add to her cyborg "collection." If, however, Steel is not a cyborg, then he will be terminated by De'cine's partner, B'add, a Krenon who, oddly, has modelled himself after a wild-west cowboy of Earth.

Dear Steelworkers,

STEEL #0 is, bar none, the best issue of STEEL I have ever read. I greatly enjoyed your showing several flashbacks to John Henry's past, such as scenes from his childhood, how he ended up working for Amertek and created the Toastmasters, and how he made the decision to use his skills to become the Man of Steel. I also enjoyed his battle with Black Ops, and the way Steel's armor displayed unusual powers. I wonder if the powers have something to do with the fact that Steel got that armor from Dakota in the "Worlds Collide" saga.

Hazard must have an entire arsenal of metahumans since he had some new super-villains with him this time, but it seems like Split and Shellshock have become recurring characters. I think that you should make Hazard break Bloodsport out of prison and send him against Steel. I mean, Bloodsport is racist, and he would prove a dangerous foe against Steel and D.C.'s hoods. Think about it.

And when will John Henry decide to get a job as a steelworker to help out his family? In fact, it would be an interesting story for John Henry, not Steel, to find himself some saboteurs from atop a construction site. Think about that, also.

Daniel McCaffery
Chesapeake City, MD

John's not heading back to the high steel any time soon, Daniel. Right now, most of the Irons family bills are being paid by the money John made working for Amertek (John's actually pretty wealthy right now). Also, we can assume that the

house is paid for, the kids go to public school, Butter and Bess are probably old enough to collect social security, and Blondell is bringing in some money from her job (whatever that is). And Tyke is a foster child, so at least some of his expenses are paid for by the state.

A few letters have come in asking for Bloodsport, so we'll see.

And that was a good guess you had for solving the mystery of Steel's armor. Right now it's as valid an explanation as any, although an unlikely one. All the answers will be along shortly.



Dear Editor,
Re: STEEL #0

What happened to the suit? It's been a question since we first met him...is John Henry Irons a metahuman or not? Now, at last, it becomes clear that either he is a metahuman, or he built some things into that armor that even he didn't know about (which would qualify him as a metahuman anyway). A nice recap of what has gone before, and some nice setup for what will be coming up.

All in all, an okay issue for people coming on board, but a pretty slow issue for those of us who have been with him for the long version of this month's story...the one that took place over the last seven issues.

Norman Barth
Fresh Meadows, NY

That was pretty much the point of all the zero issues...to provide easy access points to the entire DC Universe lineup — to recap, refresh, and review. At the same time, we threw in a hook for the readers who have been around since day one. Is Steel a metahuman? Is his armor sentient? Is it possessed? Is Steel possessed? Or is someone manipulating Steel from behind the scenes? Someone with his or her own agenda? Stick around and find out!



Dear Frank,

I've really been enjoying STEEL, but I have some concerns about the book's future. From what I understand, plans are for Steel, after ZERO HOUR, to discover he has the power to summon his armor at will, and then perhaps journey into space. While I think it's a good idea for Steel

to go out into the larger DC Universe for a bit, I'm worried that this book will lose the realism and more down-to-earth feeling it has if Steel gains superpowers. Sure, superpowers are cool, the fanboys dig them, but once Steel gets any power that a human in the real world couldn't have, the book will never be the same, even if he's placed in the most realistic of situations. When the reader reads a story about Batman, Robin, or Steel, in his present state, there's something that makes the story more meaningful, because that could be any person, were they driven to it.

By the time this letter sees print, these changes will probably have already occurred, and I'll still be reading this title faithfully, but I hope you keep in mind some of the things that drew people to STEEL in the beginning before making any further drastic changes in the character.

I also have some questions about Steel that don't seem to be explainable.

- 1) How does Steel's mask change facial expressions? It's solid steel!
- 2) Where does he keep the hammer which seems to pop out of nowhere every once in a while?
- 3) What fuels his booster jets which enable him to fly?
- 4) Where is his fuel stored?
- 5) How does he pay for this fuel? Something powerful enough to lift all that steel so far into the sky must cost a lot, and he must go through a lot of it.

Maybe I'm being a bit nit-picky and silly, but these are things that I can't help wondering about when reading your book!

Jacob Huebert
North Lima, OH

I took the liberty of combining two of your letters into one big one, because you covered a lot of what readers seem to be curious about. First, the answers to your questions...

- 1) His mask's facial expressions are definitely tied to the armor mystery...and we'll learn more as John does. Or maybe John just has really strong facial muscles! (Only kidding!)
- 2) The hammer (which has an extendable handle) is magnetized, and John keeps it attached to his back, under his cape. The best shot of this is in issue #3, page 8, although from time to time it's shown up elsewhere.

3) This hasn't been explored, but it's safe to assume that the jets are powered by plain old rocket fuel (that John may have "enhanced" somehow). There's also a possibility that, since we've never seen him run out of fuel, that this is also connected to the strange properties of his armor.

4) The fuel is stored in his hip compartments, runs down the tubing on his legs and through the gear in his boots, where it's ignited, sending him up, up, and away.

5) See the response to this month's first letter for the financial answer you're looking for. As for the weight/fuel ratio...it might be expensive...or it might not, depending on how many of the armor's attributes are artificial and not some aspect of latent powers John may or may not have.

Regarding those powers, Jacob, I know exactly where you're coming from, but I tend to disagree about the reality part. Steel wears armor. He flies. He's already got both feet planted firmly in the realm of fantasy. I get your point about the readers being able to identify with him, but I think that, even if John Henry became Putty-Man (and he will), as long as he remains in character and stays true to himself, there's been no betrayal (for lack of a better word) of the character or the series. The identifiability comes into play not as "this guy has no powers, so I could be him," but instead, "this guy just got powers, and he's acting just like I would." I suppose it's all a matter of perspective. Let us know what you think in the coming months as we, and John, explore this new power and the blessing or curse that it may turn out to be. Thanks for writing!



Dear Editor,

I've never written to a comic before, though I taught myself to read as a boy of five. I just had to know what was in those word balloons, comics being my only visual entertainment. Dad was in the military, stationed overseas, me with him. English television wasn't available, but we got a couple of English radio stations. Theater of the mind was my theater, so I've been in the DC Universe for awhile. It's a wild and wonderful place. It strengthens the power of imagination, and it's somewhere I can go every week. Anyway, it's given me a great deal of enjoyment to be there with my favorite DC characters and cheer for the good guys. Like other readers I've put my detective skills to the test, to find out quite often I'm correct in my predictions of what's to come or who's involved. The only thing is, I always mention it after the fact, so I thought just for fun that I'd write in before the next issue to see how far out to lunch I am. Here goes...

In STEEL #0, page 18, Hazard is

about to murder John Henry when, "SHRAKKT! BDOW!" the armor appears to protect him, only he has no idea how or why. But I have some ideas of my own.

When you go back to the battle at Engine City in ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN #505, there were two beings involved who might be responsible. One is Supergirl, the other is Hank Henshaw. Hank Henshaw's power to inhabit machines and metals is incomprehensible, and I'm thinking that as Superman vibrated the cyborg to pieces, Henshaw didn't stick around. It's possible that he left Engine City in Steel's armor, undetected even by Hal Jordan's ring in GREEN LANTERN #46. Henshaw showed Mongul he can do this when he "jumped" into a technical system to avoid being killed in SUPERMAN #81, page 13.

Supergirl comes in when she restores Steel's armor. She did the same thing that she did for Superman's trashed costume: "A telekinetic realignment of those tatters will truly finish things." I figure Henshaw was in the armor while it was still badly trashed. When Supergirl "reconstructed" the armor, using her abilities, she had to borrow material from her surroundings to fill in the gaps. In an unexpected twist, Henshaw may have found himself trapped by an alien structural design that Supergirl imposed on him. Supergirl's telekinetic reconstruction of the armor might have unwittingly created a prison that holds the essence of what is Hank Henshaw, at the subatomic level.

Even though John Henry reforged and pounded on that armor in STEEL #1, it goes beyond his "blueprint," simply because Supergirl "reengineered" it for him. If this is the case, there's no doubt that, eventually, Henshaw will find a way to confront Superman again. What better place to strike than from Steel's armor, where (for now) he's safe and hidden?

It has also occurred to me that Hank Henshaw might actually be dead, and that Supergirl is the sole reason for Steel's very protective armor. Supergirl is an artificial life form, commanding unimaginable forces. Since the armor's repair comes from her subconscious power of will, it's possible that she leaves an infinitesimal part of herself as the foundation of what this new armor is. The fact that Supergirl lives and breathes ensures the integrity of the armor, which (in her mind) only John Henry is supposed to wear, has formed a subconscious psychokinetic link. Supergirl probably doesn't know she's doing it, but a fear signal from John Henry might have caused Supergirl to envision Steel in her mind, actually putting the armor back on him at the critical moment Hazard fired on him.

The only other thing I can think of is that Henshaw's inhabiting the

armor may have left some signature life force without sentient direction. S-Girl's powers, imposed on the armor, might have evolved this condition, producing an armor that has become symbiotic.

And I don't know if it was a lead or not, but in the STEEL #6 lettercolumn, you said, "...we hope that in the coming months the new armor will grow on you as much as it will John Henry..."

So, now that you figure I'm dumber than a bag of hammers, I just thought I'd ask. What is a Baldy? And have I come even remotely close with this?

Bruce Bonnell
Ontario, Canada

A Baldy is one of life's great mysteries, and only we here at DC, and a select few SUPERMAN readers know what they truly are. Oh, and Bigfoot. Bigfoot knows.

As for your incredible piece of detective work, all I can say is, well...good work and keep detecting! Everything sounds plausible. Hank could have "morphed" or merged with Steel's armor. And Supergirl certainly may have "helped" John's suit. But Hank turned up, very much alive and more dangerous than ever, in last year's three-issue miniseries SUPERMAN/DOOMSDAY: HUNTER/PREY, and boy, did he give Supes a headache.

And if Supergirl did fix Steel's armor, it would've been by manipulating its molecules. No part of her essence would have transferred over. No psychic bond would have been formed.

Regardless, your theories were very, very cool (I wish we'd thought of 'em). But as Steel's armor continues to behave strangely, he just may wish that he had Hank to face instead. That, I'm afraid, may be far less painful.



NEXT ISSUE: Following the events in SUPERMAN #99, John Henry Irons teams up with the real steel deal! Superman and Steel must fight side by side to take down Bomb, an explosive menace with plans to destroy Washington...but there's more to this being than meets the eye...and in defeating him Steel will open up a door in his life that he thought he'd closed forever.

OVER IN SUPERBOY: The stakes have been raised in The Kid's fight against the Silicon Dragons, as Superboy finds himself allied with Knockout, Captain Boomerang, Deadshot, Sidearm, and King Shark. It's a suicide mission in three parts that you won't want to miss. Check out "Watery Grave" Part One in SUPERBOY #13, still on sale!

Frank Pitterese
—Gettin' late, gotta go